

**Political History Collection  
Interview H.0054.01 : Tape 1**

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**Interviewed by:** Paljor Tsarong  
**Name:** Lhamo Tsering [Tib. lha mo tshe ring]  
**Gender:** Male  
**Age:** 68  
**Date of Birth:** 1924

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## **Abstract**

Lhamo Tsering [Tib. lha mo tshe ring] was the secretary-aide of Gyalo Thondup and was part of the second group of Tibetans trained by the CIA in America in 1958-59. In this interview, he discusses how after returning to India from the USA, he came to manage much of the CIA's operation in Tibet for Gyalo Thondup. He also talks about how he and Gyalo Thondup met at the Minority University in Nanjing and how after the Guomindang lost control of that area, the schools were closed and they went to India. He describes the situation concerning Gyalo Thondup's trip to Taiwan and how he wasn't allowed to leave. He then discusses the beginning of the Dedön Tshogpa ((Tibet) Welfare Association), a resistance organization in Kalimpong, and how other groups began to form over time, and how they tried to become more involved internationally regarding the situation in Tibet. Additionally, he describes the first six CIA airdrops made in Tibet between 1957 and 1960.

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## **Tape 1**

**Q:** As we have just spoken, I wanted to ask you [questions] mainly about the 1950s. However, since you worked with Sawangchemmo [Gyalo Thondup] during the 1950s, I also want to ask you how your connection first began.

**A:** In 1945, in the Guomindang capital of Nanjing, there was a University called Border Minorities University [Tib. mtha' tshams mi rigs mtho rim slob grwa]. I was accepted into that and I left for the university. When I got there, things were not well organized and it [my education] could not begin right away. So they said that we could go sightseeing for a month and then return. So we went sightseeing and arrived in the large city called Shanghai.

Since I had to change trains, I waited for a while and bought a newspaper. In the paper, it said that Tibetan representative groups had come in which Künsangtse [Tib. kun bzang rtse] and others were the chair[men of]. Likewise, it was said that the Dalai Lama's brother, Gyalo Thondup [Tib. rgya lo don grub], had also come. There were about 3 or 4 of us who were Amdowas from the Qinghai area. So we said that it might be a good idea to go and meet since we were the same countrymen. That's when we first met. This group had concluded their work of giving greetings [congratulations] to winning World War II.

Sawangchemmo [Gyalo] stayed in Nanjing for a while saying that he was going to a Chinese [university] and so from that time [on], we had a connection. At that time, he had joined the Political University where there was a special class [Tib. dmigs bsal 'dzin grwa zindra], and I was at Border Minorities University. So we stayed together for three years.

**Q:** What year did it start?

**A:** [It was] from 1946, '47, '48. By 1948, the Guomindang had virtually lost. So they went to Taiwan. They lost what they called mainland China [Tib. skam sa chen po]. Then all of our schools were closed, so we took the boat to Hong Kong. From there we came to India. Sawangchemmo and I were together. When he arrived in India, he had plans to go to Tibet, but he had some financial difficulties and stayed in India temporarily [in 1949]. He went to Calcutta and learned a little bit of English.

**Q:** Was this in 1950?

**A:** No, it was in 1949. India had just gained independence and Nehru was the Prime Minister. Nehru invited Seykusho [Tib. sras sku zhabs][Gyalo] on an official visit for a week in Delhi. Then he went down to Calcutta and stayed there for about a year, until 1950.

**Q:** Where were you at that time?

**A:** We were together, since Nanjing, we were sort of together. It is this way. The Dalai Lama's mother, Gyayum Chemo [Tib. rgyal yum chen mo], and my mother knew each other very well. The reason being that Gyayum Chemo's mother was our neighbor. So they must have known each other since they were young. So there was a connection.

**Q:** So you were in China in 1947, '48, '49. Were the Communists saying anything about liberating Tibet?

**A:** No, nothing whatsoever. At that time, when we escaped, Qinghai was not lost. Sichuan was not lost, neither was Guangzhou, nor the island of Hainan.

**Q:** So the Guomindang authority was there and Chiang Kaishek had not left?

**A:** Chiang Kaishek had already left. At that time, in Guangdong, the capital of Guangzhou Province, armies from the places around were gathered there and they were sent to Taiwan. When we left, Qinghai was not lost nor was Sichuan. When we got to Hong Kong, all was lost. During that time, there was no talk of liberating Tibet since until Qinghai was taken, Tibet could not be touched.

**Q:** So when you came to India, what were the Indians saying? This was in 1949, right? What was in the mind of the Indian government?

**A:** At that time—now—the question of losing Tibetan places, Amdo and Kham—it started in 1948. Immediately after the loss of Qinghai and Sichuan, in the Amdo area, they put up a lot of resistance. But they had not come to the main Tibet [Tib. bod]. In October 1950, Chamdo was lost. From 1949, they made a lot of preparations and they had already decided to liberate Tibet. However, from a peaceful point of view.

Then in 1950, [in] the first or the second month, Sawangchemmo and Lhajang Kusho [his wife] [Tib. lha lcam sku zhabs] went to Hong Kong via the Philippines to visit her parents. Then I don't know how [he/they] went to Taiwan. In Taiwan, he was not allowed to leave, like [being under] house arrest, and they didn't let him go outside.

**Q:** Yes, he mentioned to me about staying there [for] about 8 months or so.

**A:** Taiwan had planned to use him politically in the future, so they kept him there and didn't allow him to leave. I was in India and Gyayum Chemo came, and the Dalai Lama was in Yadong.

**Q:** At that time, Chamdo was already lost, right?

**A:** Chamdo was lost in the 10th month. Around the 6th month, the Tibetan government sent a group of representatives to talk [Tib. zhi 'grigs] from a peaceful point of view with the Chinese, [and] to go from India to Beijing. The head of the delegation was Kungö Shakabpa and this delegation arrived in Kalimpong. They arrived after Sawangchemmo left. I think it was in the 6th month. The delegation went to Delhi and they also asked me to go. Kungö Depön [Taklha] asked me to come since I would also help them with copying the Chinese writing, and I went to Delhi and I stayed for about two months. So they talked and stalled, talked and stalled.

**Q:** What were the Chinese saying at this time?

**A:** There were basically two general points. "Tibet is a part of China, so accept that. Secondly, if you go to Beijing, then we will peacefully liberate [Tibet]." Basically, it was that Tibet was a part of China and that we had to accept it. That's it.

**Q:** So they came to Delhi, at the Chinese Embassy?

**A:** It was the new representative. He had just arrived.

**Q:** So they were saying go to Beijing to talk?

**A:** Yes, "Go to Beijing and we will have everything ready. Whether you want to talk here or in Beijing, it doesn't matter. However, you cannot say that Tibet is independent. It has always [been a] part of China. So you can say [talk about] it here and you should also say it soon since we have already decided to liberate [Tibet]. If you get there soon, then we can discuss the peaceful liberation." However, the English and the Indians were not giving passes to go to Hong Kong. So after that, they met on and off. Then, until October, they could not go nor talk. Then they liberated [Chamdo] in the 10th month.

**Q:** So they were saying that they wanted to travel on Tibetan passes?

**A:** Yes, at that time there were Tibetan permits. Then when Chamdo was lost, the delegation was withdrawn. Then Sawang Ngabö and others were sent, and another was sent to India. The earlier one was withdrawn. This was in October 1950.

In 1952, Seykusho [Gyalo] was able to leave Taiwan and he went to America, [and] from there to India. Then we all went to Tibet.

**Q:** He stayed in Taiwan for eight or nine months. So in the end, they allowed him to go?

**A:** Later, one reason why it happened was that Taktse Rimpoche [Tib. stag 'tsher rin po che] was in America, and he made arrangements saying that he wanted to meet his younger brother, and so he invited him. At that time, the U.S. was very powerful and they were helping Taiwan. So the U.S. told Taiwan to let him go. So from America, it was either the first or second month of 1952. However, it was Tibetan New Year, the second month. So at that time, Gyaum Chemo, Ngari [Tib. mnga' ris] Rimpoche, and

all, went to Tibet.

**Q:** Was the U.S. saying not to accept the 17-Point Agreement or what? Were they saying that they were going to help or what?

**A:** I'm not too sure, but when the Dalai Lama was in Yadong, the Americans were saying don't return and they would invite him out. That they tried a lot. How I knew about this was that at Dr. Graham's home in Kalimpong, there was the chairman of China's Democratic Party named Zhao Junmei. He was invited by Delhi University to give a lecture and in Kalimpong, he was probably invited by some friends. He spoke English well. Through him, the U.S. government worked for the Dalai Lama to not return to Tibet, and to relate that if the Dalai Lama went to some foreign country, then the U.S. would help. I heard this a lot. Not only did I hear this, but I also went to meet him.

**Q:** What's his name?

**A:** Zhao Junmei, he was a famous person in the Party during the Guomindang. He was an intellectual, a professor. I think he was a professor of political science. So through him, there was this connection. Though I had no business, he told me what the situation was, that he thought that it was better the Dalai Lama not go.

**Q:** That the U.S. would help?

**A:** I heard about this, but I was not actually involved in this. Then on the 14th or 15th of the Losar, we arrived there [Lhasa--in 1952]. We stayed for six months.

**Q:** In 1952?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** In Lhasa?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** With Kungö [Gyalo Thondup]?

**A:** I went too.

**Q:** Gyayum Chemo also went?

**A:** Yes. Everyone was there at that time. Ngari Rimpoche was there, Tsering Drolma [Tib. tshe ring sgrol ma] [the Dalai Lama's elder sister].

**Q:** So in 1952, you all went. The 17-Point Agreement was implemented after discussions, and so was it a situation where things were considered not so bad?

**A:** Sawangchemmo's idea, which he used to say since he was in China, was that Tibet definitely needed political reform. He used to say that the present system was not okay. In 1952, what he was thinking, was that since the Chinese had just come and they had not established themselves well, we should make changes as soon as possible. That we were definitely going to be under China, but in order so that things wouldn't get bad and there would not be bloodshed, there may be something that we could do. That's what he was thinking. That before the Chinese began the liberation, [he thought] we should do the liberation. [I know] because that's what he used to tell me all the time. So he said these things to the government, sought audiences with the Dalai Lama and must have also told him that we should start the liberation before they did. So what we had to do was—the government officials [should] retain their household estates and the other land should be redistributed to the people. The taxes should be brought to some limit and should not be collected recklessly, and we should make a rule. In the long run, this may not be so helpful, but temporarily, it would be since one's own people would like their own government and, therefore, the Chinese would not be able to become too powerful. So he said these things a lot. But it was something that could not be done soon, and what he did was begin reforms on his own estates. He was not able to go to Gyantse, but he went to Seshing [Tib. zas zhim] and all the others. There were a lot of outstanding loans, and he said he didn't want them at all and burnt all the papers. Then he told them that Yabshi would pay for any work they did for the Yabshi. He did burn all the papers. He did that at Seshing and, like the Chinese, it was some kind of liberation.

**Q:** When he went there [Lhasa], he must have told the Kashag or the Sitsab?

**A:** Yes, he did. He met them often and told them. And they made plans to make changes.

**Q:** They did?

**A:** Yes, yes. At that time, I did not know. Later, whether it is in the Dalai Lama's biography or what, there were plans. Plans to make changes to the taxes, however, they were not able to implement them.

**Q:** So you stayed for some time in Lhasa, how long was that?

**A:** Six months (in 1952).

**Q:** What was your impression at that time?

**A:** During this time, the Chinese had not established themselves because they didn't know the language, the altitude was too high and the soldiers—for example, when we were traveling, most of the soldiers were sick and their hearts were beating [fast]. They

were not getting enough oxygen and so they couldn't sleep well, and when they ate, they couldn't digest well. So there were many soldiers going to the hospitals. However, they were a powerful force, right?

The reason Sawangchemmo returned—to relate this concisely—was that the Panchen Lama was coming to Tibet and they, I think, wanted the Dalai Lama to come and receive him. So, in Tibet, there is no such custom that the Dalai Lama comes to greet the Panchen Lama. So Sawangchemmo must have had a talk with the higher authorities [Chinese] saying that this was not appropriate. That was one thing that they did not like. Secondly, the [Chinese] government said that the Sitsab, Lukhangwa, and—what's his name? [PT: Lobsang Tashi] Lobsang Tashi, should stop working [be demoted]. So Sawangchemmo told [the Chinese] that the two were very much trusted by the Tibetan people and that they were saying that they had colluded with imperialism, and that this was absolutely not the case. That's another thing they did not like. So they must have thought that Sawangchemmo's thinking was not so good. So at Vienna, there was the Eastern Communist Youth Organization [Tib. shar phyogs norling ?? gi gzhon nu tshogs pa] in Austria. They had plans to send him as the representative of the Tibetan Youth. I think that they were not going to let him stay around. So because of this, we both ran away.

**Q:** Via Jora [Tib. sbyor ra] and Chayü [Tib. bya yul], right?

**A:** In the southern areas there were three large estates. As I mentioned earlier, the estates were done away with, the poor were given barley, and the taxes were fixed, and we gradually ran away. Then during about the 7th month of 1952, we arrived in India.

**Q:** So, after that, you stayed mostly in India?

**A:** Then we moved to Darjeeling from Kalimpong. Then in 1954, Kungö Shakabpa, Khenjung Lobsang Gyentsenla [Tib. blo bzang rgyal mtshan], and Sawangchemmo, formed the Tibet Welfare Association or Dedön Tshogpa [Tib. bod kyi bde don tshogs pa].

In 1955 [actually in 1954], the Dalai Lama was invited to China and they were very much against this, saying that the Dalai Lama was forcefully taken down, and they made a great effort in the international scope [Tib. rgyal spyi'i nang]. However, since they [Chinese] had good relations with the Indians, they would not permit any political activity.

**Q:** The Indians were not permitting [activity], right?

**A:** The Indians were not letting them do [things] at all from their relational point of view. So up to 1957, this committee propagated the Tibetan issue abroad and made connections within Tibet.

**Q:** So it had not started around 1952, '53?

**A:** No.

**Q:** After you arrived in '52, for one or two years, there were no organizations?

**A:** No, not in any big way. At that time, there was Tharchin [Tib. mthar phyin] Babu and his newspaper. So in this, to make the issue of Tibet known to the outside and the situation of Tibetans [in India], we helped some. We did some of that because the Indian government would not permit any political activity. Whenever there was a meeting, it took place around the tea gardens near Teesta. A phone call would be made to Shakabpa and [Khenjung Lobsang Gyentsen], and the two would come for a picnic. So they met many times in the tea gardens. The Indians knew immediately, they looked, but they didn't say anything. So in certain empty and secluded places, they discussed [things].

**Q:** So they couldn't meet openly?

**A:** No, never.

**Q:** So this committee was started in fifty what?

**A:** 1954. When they started, they probably did not do it politically. They called it the Welfare Association, to look after the people. They gave this name, the work [answer not finished]

**Q:** Yes, since they could not do it openly.

**A:** That's correct.

**Q:** What kind of work did they do? Was it mainly to make the case of Tibet heard outside or what?

**A:** To print the news of Tibet whenever something happened. Other than that, there was nothing much to be done. And in Tibet, to make secret connections and send people, hoping to increase their activities in the future. [They wanted to say] that we were doing such things in India and that those in Tibet should not lose hope. Otherwise, there wasn't anybody helping us effectively.

**Q:** Then during this time, in 1952, '53, '54, in Tibet, there was the People's Association.

**A:** That was in 1952. In the 3rd month when we were in Lhasa.

**Q:** Yes, and later with Alo Chöndze and others.

**A:** At that time, we were not there.

**Q:** So did the Kalimpong organization have connections with the one in Tibet?

**A:** At that time, yes! There were. I do not know what they did, but what I know is [that they] gave verbal messages and sent letters. I use to help them when they got to the picnic, but I was not in the group. I took part in the group in 1958. So when the Dedön Tshogpa started, I only had that work.

**Q:** What was the main work?

**A:** Now that I think about it, they were doing a lot of work in Tibet making connections.

**Q:** With the People's Association?

**A:** This I did not know.

**Q:** Only later?

**A:** Only later in 1959, when the Dedön Tshogpa ended, then I came to know everything.

**Q:** So what kind of connection did they have with the People's Association?

**A:** They must have been hoping to get some kind of support from here [India] and the leaders here must have been hoping to start a big [word unclear]. So I didn't know at all.

**Q:** Then the People's Association, in their agitation against the Chinese, was distributing a lot of pamphlets and it is said that these were being printed in India.

**A:** Yes, this is very possible. At that time, they had done a lot, Kungö Shakabpa and others. At that time, I was not in it. I only became part of the group in 1958. In 1957, they started their connection with the CIA of the U.S.

**Q:** When was this?

**A:** In 1957.

**Q:** In 1957?

**A:** I think it was the winter of 1956. Then in 1957, around the time of the Losar, the batch for training was sent to the U.S. [actually to Saipan Island]

**Q:** Fifty what did you say?

**A:** In 1957, it was towards the end of 1956 or something. When this batch was sent, I was not there [in the group]. The first batch was sent for wireless operations. I was not there. Then in 1958, for the second batch, I was told to go. The reason being that there were very few who knew English. Among those who knew English was Yuthok Seykusho Jigmela [Tib. 'jigs med], and Sandu Rinchen la [Tib. sa 'du rin chen] was the other. There were only two of them. So since I had studied English for a year, I knew some. Even that became quite worthy because, on the one hand, you had to be secretive, and on the other hand, you had to know some English since one had to be like an interpreter. So I studied some and then went to America.

**Q:** Did you go there [America]?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Was it Colorado?

**A:** At first it was not Colorado, but Virginia.

**Q:** Yes, their office was there.

**A:** I stayed in Virginia for about three to four months and then the camp moved to Colorado.

**Q:** How many Tibetans were there?

**A:** There were only about 11 people. That was the second batch. The first one was not in the States but in Guam [Saipan]. The second one was at Hale.

**Q:** Which place?

**A:** In the States it is close to Guam in the Pacific Ocean.

**Q:** Is it Utah?

**A:** No, there is this place called Guam, in the Pacific Ocean.

**Q:** Yes, Guam I know.

**A:** It's a small island. Then we moved to Colorado and when the second batch returned, I was withdrawn. Then the training expanded and people were sent continuously. After that, a lot of interpreters came out. So I returned and I was responsible for dropping missions into Tibet and for sending people for training. Then I stopped working for the Dedön Tshogpa.

**Q:** So after that, was there a Dedön Tshogpa?

**A:** No, after that there wasn't any. After that there was Panja or something. The organization (tshogpa) is still there in Kalimpong, but I don't think it's called Dedön Tshogpa.

**Q:** When was the first drop made in Tibet?

**A:** The first one was... I think it was 1957. Put the tape off.

**Q:** Earlier I asked you which places the drops were made, right?

**A:** Yes, correct.

**Q:** However, there seems [to be] no point in going through all the details since your book is going to be out within a year, so we can refer to that. So I want to ask you in general since it would be helpful when we ask others—where were the first drops made?

**A:** The first one was in 1956 in the eighth month, 30th day [Western calendar, I think]. Close to Samye [Tib. bsam yas] Monastery [actually this was in 1957]. The second drop was in 1958, the ninth month at Kham Litang [actually in 1957].

**Q:** How many people?

**A:** This one was five people [actually only 3].

**Q:** The earlier one, the Samye one?

**A:** The Samye one was only two people.

**Q:** Why did you drop two people at Samye. What use are two people?

**A:** No, it's not that. At that time we didn't know what was going on inside. If we had to send a person [or not].

**Q:** Couldn't somebody just go in via Gangtok?

**A:** If they did that, it would take a minimum of 18 days. Back and forth a letter would take one month. So we needed to know what was going on soon and [they needed to know] what we were doing. So first, to have the relationship. Secondly, we needed to know what was going on right away. It seems that that was how things were operated.

**Q:** So the people who were dropped were wireless people?

**A:** Yes, they had all the equipment with them.

**Q:** And then they sent the messages?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Where?

**A:** At that time, there were connections with the U.S.

**Q:** So where did they listen from?

**A:** In America.

**Q:** No, I mean, for example, they were dropped near Samye. And let's just say that they sent a message saying that the guerrillas had moved to Drigutang and [that there was] a lot of talk. So where did they relate the message to?

**A:** This they could send from outside or from a house.

**Q:** Where?

**A:** In the forest. The reason being that the gadgets were new models. It didn't take much time, only one second. So nobody could know about it. So one got all the messages ready inside [house] and sent them from the outside. There was a gadget in which you recorded and it just went "thi-rik".

**Q:** That soon!?

**A:** Yes, that fast.

**Q:** Then they had already received it?

**A:** You could not receive it by ear. There was a special machine that slowly brought out the machine [the message]. They made a special one for secrecy so that people wouldn't know. The machine one could just be carried in one's pocket.

**Q:** So you were dropping people mainly for information purposes?

**A:** No, it was not only [for] information. In the northern areas in Tibet there were many guerrillas who were revolting. So contacts

were made with them to see how many were there and what weapons were needed. If we had to make a drop without the wireless, we didn't know where to make the drop. So one had to have a wireless in order to make a drop. So at all of the places that we dropped, [there were] the guerrillas, and so we got information about them. For example, here there are 1,000 soldiers. Here there are 500. They needed such arms and then from there, we sent food, supplies, arms, and advertisement pamphlets. At that time, there was the advice of the Dalai Lama. A lot of that they took with them and dropped.

**Q:** Concisely, what kinds of advice was there.

**A:** For all the people, what should I say, for the sake of one's own nationality, one should not lose hope, and that all should be united against the Communists, perhaps something like that.

**Q:** Was there anything specific about opposing the Chinese?

**A:** I'll give you a copy later because that was the advice of the Dalai Lama and if I make a mistake [that would be bad], since this was the order from the Dalai Lama, right?

**Q:** Yes, yes . Then, briefly, what other places were the drops made at?

**A:** The first was at Samye, the second at Litang, and the third was at Chang Namtso [Tib. byang gnam mtsho] in 1959, the 9th month.

**Q:** What was the reason a drop was made there?

**A:** At the place called Nagtsang [Tib. nag tshang], over 4,000 people were revolting, led by Nagtsang Phurbu [Tib. phur bu]. It was very big. However, by the time we got there, they were not there. The [PLA] soldiers were sent in and they had been obliterated [Tib. rtsa med btang]. What we had heard was that there was such a revolt. So in order to make connections with them, we sent people in. When we got there, they were destroyed and [the airdropped people] fled. That was the third [drop].

The fourth and fifth drops were made at Jagra Pembar [Tib. lcags ra dpal 'bar], in the area of Shotalthosum (Shopando [Tib. sho pa mdo], Pembar [Tib. dpal 'bar] and Lhodzong [Tib. lho rdzong]).

**Q:** Was it in the southern area in Kham?

**A:** Yes, it was in the Khyungpo Tengchen [Tib. khyung po steng chen] and Riwoche [Tib. ri bo che] area. This was probably in 1959, the ninth month. That worked out very well.

**Q:** How many [were] in the Kham [area]?

**A:** There were three "wireless groups," or tartso, [Hin. tar; Tib. tshogs]. One to go to Amdo, one to Kham and another right there in Pembar. At that time, in Jagra Pemba, Jagra Trülku was the leader of a very strong revolt. About four or five thousand. This is about how the war was fought at Jagra Pembar.

Then at Chang Nagchuka [Tib. byang nag chu kha]—it's near Thangla. Here, in 1960, the second month, it was dropped. Then the last one was in Markham [Tib. smar khams], there's no date on that. Then at Pemakö, we got ready in 1960.

**Q:** Where was it?

**A:** Pemakö—you know, where India's Assam area called Sathia is. Going east of the Tsangpo and then coming out to the south, there is a place called Pemakö [Tib. pad ma bkod]. The Chinese had not come to this place and so we had plans to hold that place. After that, in 1962 [answer not finished]

**Q:** Oh, I see. In 1960, they had not come to that place?

**A:** No, they had not. We had prepared for two years and had done a lot of preparations. The younger ones were trained, an airfield was made, and bridges were built. We had planned to make a second Mustang there. Then, in 1962, the Sino-Indian War broke out in Bomdila, and so we were not able to stay there and left. So that's it, to tell you briefly.